

Epiphany 5

February 9, 2020

Rev. Timothy C. Linstrom

Lutheran Church of the Holy Spirit, Lincolnshire, Illinois

The opening words of Jesus' "sermon on the mount", sound encouraging. These are words that speak of blessings, especially upon those who aren't so used to being blessed.

Jesus says blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven, blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted, blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth, blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness for they will be filled..... and he goes on to bless the merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemakers, and those who are persecuted. Jesus reverses the way the world see things and lets us know that nothing gets by the love and blessings of God.

But then in verse 13, where our gospel text for today begins, Jesus shifts the sermon into a different gear, as Jesus says:

You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything, but is thrown out and trampled under foot.

Salt. Jesus says we all are salt. If you think about it, salt is really an amazing mineral. It enhances the flavor of our foods, acts as a preservative, melts the ice on frozen steps and frozen roads, and it was of such great value at one time, that it was sometimes used as currency. In fact, the word salary comes from the practice of paying a worker with salt. Salt is pretty amazing when it is used; but when it isn't used, when it's just salt, or when it has somehow lost its taste, it isn't much good for anything. In fact, salt by itself can be quite terrible, even corrosive.

So Jesus' saying that we are the salt of the earth implies that we have some function to perform, some responsibility in this kingdom. Being the salt of the earth isn't about being something great and wonderful on our own;...no....its about being the ones who bring out the great and wonderful things of God's kingdom to others.

Now if Jesus' salt metaphor is a little confusing, I think he clears it up pretty well in the next three verses that follow: He says there:

You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. No one after lighting a lamp puts it under a bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see the way of God. In the end, it isn't really even our light that shines forth, it's God's light.

Salt and light are only useful when they enhance something else. We, as followers of Jesus, fulfill our roles as disciples when we flavor the earth and illuminate the world with our actions and words that ultimately point to Christ.

As long as we see the life of faith as little more than the promise of a reward, a future rest for a chosen few, we lose our flavor and our light is hidden under a basket.

When I was in Vacation Bible School a long time ago, I remember one of the songs we learned was "This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine." And I remember how we shouted when we sang that one verse, Hide it under a bushel, NO!!, I'm gonna let it shine.

And as a young impressionable seven year old, I knew for sure that I should not hide the light of Christ under a bushel. I should let everybody know that I was a Christian.

Then the next verse, "Don't let Satan blow it out, NO!!, I'm gonna let it shine. And I knew that Satan wanted to blow my light of Christ out, he wanted to extinguish my light, he wanted to dim my life, and I certainly wasn't going to let him do that!

The next verse was to shine all over our town, I'm gonna let it shine, let it shine, let it shine, let it shine. And I knew and so did all the other kids singing that song. Our faith was to shine all over our town of Richmond, Indiana. And I knew that I was to let the light of Christ shine throughout my entire lifetime.

The mood of the song was not, "I have to let it shine, or I ought to let it shine, or I must let it shine, or should let it shine. It wasn't an oppressive commandment, thou shalt let your light shine. Instead there was a positive enthusiasm for being the light of Christ, for letting the light of Christ in me to shine.

And with that same level of enthusiasm Jesus says to us today, "You are the light of the world..Yes, You and you and you and you and you. You are the light of the world!

Let your light shine! Let it shine Let it shine Let it shine.

Your Christianity is to be seen, is to be noticed, and is not to be hid. People are to know you are a Christian by what you say, by what you do, by who you are. There is no such thing as a closet Christian. At home, at work, at school, with your friends, your family, with people you meet, let your light shine, for You, yes You are the Light of the world. Because whether you know it or not, others are watching you. All those who don't have a relationship with their maker, those who want to believe but aren't sure, those who know something is missing inside, and want to know what you know, they're watching you. So let your light shine, You are the Light of the World.

I read a story recently about a church that put on the Broadway production "Godspell", and the writer talked about how participating in that show changed his life. He recalled how relieved they were that the first show was going well after many difficult practices where everyone was concerned whether they'd be ready. Just before intermission the character who played Jesus sang with the other cast members the song "You are the Light of the world." And as they sang, Jesus went out into the crowd and picked people out and to one he said, "You are the salt of the earth." To another Jesus came up to them and said, "You are the city of God." And then finally he came to one last woman as the cast kept singing and he said to her "You are the Light of the World." It was the last song before intermission and he recalled how they left the stage rocking.

It was intermission, they were half way home, and all sensed that things were going well. At the end of the show the cast concluded singing the beautiful refrain, "We can

build a beautiful city. Yes we can. Yes we can. We can build a beautiful city. Not a city of angels, but finally a city of Man", and as it came to a close, a great sense of accomplishment was felt by the entire cast.

After the show a woman approached the man saying that she had had a great time. She loved the music and was so glad she could come. She had always wondered what Godspell was and was so glad when she saw it in the paper so she could check it out. The man told her he was glad that she was there and invited her to come and worship with them at the church the next day.

The next day at church the man was talking to one of the ushers about the show the night before, and he mentioned the woman who came and talked to him after the show. She seemed to be looking for something so....and then suddenly the woman came right up to them and thanked them for inviting her to church and for the show the night before. She said I was one who in the audience who Jesus spoke to during the show. Jesus said to me, "You are the light of the world." And she said, "No one has ever called me that before."

A little while later the man said something came over me he said, I was overwhelmed with emotion. Something washed over me that he could only describe as the Holy Spirit as he prayed "Thank you God". Tears began to flow and he literally fell to his knees as he was overwhelmed with a sense of awe, wonder, sadness, joy, and purpose. "No one has ever called me that before" she said.

Jesus says to us today, "You are the Light of the world."

So let your light shine. There is a light within you that is good. There is a light within you that is God. There is light within you that needs to be seen. I think for a moment the children in this world that have never been told that they are the light of anyone's world, and it breaks my heart. I think for a moment the people who are stuck in abusive relationships, allowing their light to be crushed, and I want to scream. I think for a moment the youth that want only to hide and be as invisible as possible, so as not to draw anyone's attention, and it kills me to know that they have never been told,

"You were created in the very image of God. The light that God created at the very moment of creation. That is in you. God created you to be the light of the world.

So let your light shine! Amen!